

## 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16 – 6:2

### 1. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

16 Therefore, from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view, even if we had evaluated Christ from a worldly point of view, we now no longer evaluate him in this way. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, the old things have passed away. Look! The new has come. 18 But it is all from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them, and entrusting to us the word of reconciliation. 20 On behalf of Christ therefore, we carry out the office of an ambassador, just as if God were pleading through us, we implore people on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God! 21 The one who did not know sin, was made to be sin on our behalf, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. 6:1 But working together with God we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For it is said, “At the right time I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” Behold, now is the right time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. (Own Translation)

### 2. INTRODUCTION

This letter from Paul to the saints in Corinth, (in its entirety, or at least chapters 1—9), most likely written from Macedonia around A.D. 56,<sup>1</sup> is written into a setting where there is a history of conflict between the author and recipients, as well as between the church in Corinth and key trouble-makers within the church. Whether or not the letter is taken as a unity, the two key sections of the letter (chapters 1—9 and 10—13) are delineated by a significant change in tone, which indicates that they

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<sup>1</sup>S. J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 235.

are likely to be responses to different situations.<sup>2</sup> From a mirror reading of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the position taken in this paper is that chapters 1 to 9 were written into the following situation: (1) Paul initially writes a letter to the Corinthians dealing (at least in part) with how to relate to sexually immoral people.<sup>3</sup> (2) That letter is misunderstood, and Paul writes 1 Corinthians to respond to the misunderstanding, as well as to answer other questions which have been raised by the believers (1 Cor 7:1; 8:1; 12:1). (3) After they have received 1 Corinthians, Paul receives news of a crisis whereby a ringleader in the church has launched a personal attack on Paul.<sup>4</sup> Paul then visits Corinth to deal with this issue. The unpleasant situation unfolds whereby Paul is confronted by this person, and the church fails to back Paul up, and as such, Paul cannot enforce his own authority and must back down.<sup>5</sup> In response to this situation Paul leaves Corinth humiliated, and writes a severe letter (no longer extant), calling for the offender to be disciplined (2 Cor 2:3-4, 6, 9; 7:8). (4) This severe letter is couriered by Titus to the church in Corinth, who eventually returns to Paul with the good news that the Corinthians had responded favourably to the severe letter by repenting (7:9), disciplining the offender (2:6), and renewing their affection for Paul (7:7b). (5) It is in response to this partially resolved, yet still tentative situation that Paul writes 2 Corinthians 1—9.<sup>6</sup> If this reconstruction is accurate, then it can be said that into this situation, Paul writes 2 Corinthians chapters 1—9 to defend the authenticity of his ministry, and his apostolic authority,

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<sup>2</sup> Those writing on 2 Corinthians deal with the abrupt change of tone in varying ways. Some propose that the two sections were initially written as separate letters. So, Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC; Downers Grove: IVP, 1987), 25-35. For those who view 2 Corinthians as a unity, perhaps the best explanation for the change in tone is that new information (of a deterioration of the situation in Corinth) came to Paul after he had written chapters 1-9, but before finishing the letter. As such he wrote chapters 10-13 responding to this new situation. For a good argument in favour of this view, see D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10—13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 14-28.

<sup>3</sup> This letter is often referred to as the 'previous letter' (Paul refers to it in 1 Cor 5:9)

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the same offender referred to in 1 Cor 5:1.

<sup>5</sup> It is suggested here that this is the visit referred to by Paul as the 'painful visit' (2 Cor 2:1).

<sup>6</sup> The broad outline of this reconstruction has wide support, including, Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 14-28; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 25-33; and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1986), xxxiv.

ultimately for the purpose of consolidating the reconciliation between himself and the Corinthians which has already begun.<sup>7, 8</sup>

The passage of focus for this essay (5:16—6:2) is part of the wider section where Paul is dealing with the issue of reconciliation and a defence of his ministry (5:11—7:4). Paul makes conclusions from the preceding defence of his ministry (5:11-5), by further developing the theological basis for, and implications of, reconciliation between God and believers. In the passage which follows (6:3—7:4), he works from this established common ground to continue a defence of his ministry, and to encourage the Corinthians toward reconciliation with him as their apostle.

This passage of exhortation (5:16—6:2) begins with a description of the effect which Christ's substitutionary death (expounded in the previous passage) has in the lives of believers (vv16-17). Paul then expands and explains in vv18-19 that God is the key player in authoring and executing this work of reconciliation. The following verses summarise the ambassadorial message which has been passed on to believers (vv20-21), and Paul continues to build a case highlighting the need for the Corinthians to respond in a manner befitting of this message (6:1-2).

### 3. VERSE ANALYSIS

**v16** Perhaps once in his or her life, if ever, does a person experience a radical shift in their worldview, but it is this radical reorientation experienced by Paul after his Damascus road experience which he is referring to in verse 16.<sup>9</sup> Having established in vv14-15 that the people who participate in the death and resurrection

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<sup>7</sup> All of the material in chapters 1—9 (and probably also 10—13) can be understood as working toward this purpose. 2:17f is a key verse highlighting that an acceptance of Paul and his ministry will foster a strengthening of relationship between Paul and the Corinthians.

<sup>8</sup> A discussion of the situation behind chapters 10—13 is beyond the scope of this essay since the exegetical passage under consideration falls within chapters 1—9. However it can be said briefly that it is likely that the tentative situation as reported by Titus had blown up in the meantime while Paul was writing (and possibly having already sent) chapters 1-9. This blow up was probably precipitated by the arrival in Corinth of a group of teachers who challenged Paul's authority and put forward their own teachings on the gospel. For a more detailed analysis of the situation behind chapters 10—13 and how they relate to chapters 1—9 see Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xxxvii – li.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians* (BST; Leicester: IVP, 1988), 111.

of Christ live in a new way (that is, they live for him), Paul highlights the first effect this has on believers: they now *regard no-one from a worldly point of view*.<sup>10</sup> What follows, is a kind of parenthetical statement, where Paul acknowledges a change in his own worldview and assessment of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

There is some discussion as to the meaning here of κατὰ σάρκα (lit. according to the flesh).<sup>12</sup> It is argued here that κατὰ σάρκα is adverbial, that is, modifying the verbs οἶδαμεν (know, regard) and ἐγνώκαμεν (know, evaluate), not the noun Χριστόν (Christ).<sup>13</sup> Therefore it refers to *how* believers know Christ, as opposed to *what kind of* Christ they know (eg. an earthly or a heavenly Christ). If this is correct, then Paul must be referring here to a contrast between his pre and post conversion perspectives of Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Having established this, the question which must be answered is: ‘What does it mean to know something κατὰ σάρκα?’<sup>15</sup> Surveying Paul’s various uses of κατὰ σάρκα, Erickson highlights that when modifying a verb (as it is here) it is always a morally negative usage, that is, it refers to “humanity’s value systems as they stand in opposition to God’s.”<sup>16</sup> This fits the context here, and therefore to οἶδα (regard) someone κατὰ σάρκα is to regard them ‘according to the sinful nature’, or ‘from a worldly point of view’. In summary, Paul is suggesting that once converted, people are no longer to evaluate or judge others by outward and superficial worldly standards.<sup>17</sup>

The conditional clause, introduced by εἰ καὶ (even if) assumes the condition to be true, and changes between the two verbs of knowing: οἶδα and γινώσκω yet both

<sup>10</sup> The fact that Paul is drawing a conclusion from the previous verses is indicated by the use of ὡστε (therefore). So, C. L. Ill Rogers, and Rogers, C.L. Jr., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 403.

<sup>11</sup> “even if we had evaluated Christ from a worldly point of view, but we now no longer evaluate him in this way.” v16b

<sup>12</sup> Translated here as “from a worldly point of view”.

<sup>13</sup> So, Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 428.

<sup>14</sup> So, Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 125; and Ronald P. Byars, ‘2 Corinthians 5:12-17’ in *Interpretation* 52/3 (1998), 292.

<sup>15</sup> Whatever the answer, it has to be able to apply to Paul’s changed perspective of Christ.

<sup>16</sup> R. J. Erickson, ‘Flesh’ in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G.F. Hawthorne, Martin, R.P., Reid, D.G.; Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1993)

<sup>17</sup> Ben Ill. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 395.

seem to be referring the same concept. It is likely that Paul is using them here as synonyms, with the meaning 'regard', 'appraise', or 'evaluate', changing between the two for stylistic purposes.<sup>18</sup> The use of the perfect tense (ἐγνώκαμεν – regard, evaluate) to refer to a past reality which is no longer the current state is very unusual. The shift to the present tense likely refers to the continuing aspect of the action – *we no longer [continue to] evaluate him in this way.*

It should not be surprising that Paul is talking about methods of evaluating people in the context of defending of his ministry. From a mirror reading of 2 Corinthians, it appears likely that one of the key criticisms of Paul's ministry was that it was not triumphalist, but considered 'unsuccessful' in that it was marked with suffering (1:5-11; 6:3-10). With this key criticism in mind, Hafemann suggests that seeing Christ from a worldly point of view (κατὰ σάρκα) involves a rejection of his ministry because of the suffering he endured.<sup>19</sup> That is: concluding that Jesus clearly couldn't be the Christ because he died on the cross. Paul himself had rejected Jesus as the Christ on these grounds. But Paul urges his readers not to evaluate Christ or anyone else in this way (κατὰ σάρκα), and is therefore hinting at them not to evaluate his own ministry in this way. As such Hafemann sees this verse as more ammunition in Paul's defence of his ministry which is marked with suffering.<sup>20</sup>

**v17** Introduced by another ὥστε (therefore), Paul makes a second conclusion in light of vv14-15. Anyone who no longer lives for themselves but lives for Christ (vv14-15) is spoken of here as being 'in Christ', he or she is a new creation. Paul's use of ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ) is very common throughout his writings, and is best taken here to include both individual and corporate aspects, that is, a personal union

<sup>18</sup> Harris notes the οἶδα and γινώσκω do have distinctive meanings in classical Greek, but these clear distinctions are not maintained in the NT. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 427.

<sup>19</sup> S. J. Hafemann, 'Corinthians, Letters to the' in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. R.P.M. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: IVP, 1993)170.

<sup>20</sup> There is a lot to commend this view, in that it makes sense of why in the previous verses (vv14-15), and in what follows (vv18-19), Paul references the cross and highlights the purpose for the suffering and death of Christ in the context of a defence of his ministry (5:11-7:4). Paul uses the validity of Christ's suffering ministry as a paradigm for his own ministry marked with suffering. Those who assess Paul from a worldly perspective will mark him as a failure, however his sufferings are not marks of failure, but on the contrary – as evidenced by Christ – marks of authentic ministry, whereby Paul is following in the footsteps of Christ.

with the risen Christ, as well as being included in the body of Christ – the church.<sup>21</sup> Harris notes that Paul’s concept of καινὴ κτίσις (a new creation) is comparable to John’s γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (Jn 3:7) and Peter’s ἀναγεννηθῆναι (1 Pet 1:3, 23) – ‘to be born anew/again’.<sup>22</sup> In the context of Paul’s argument, to be a new creation here specifically includes looking at the world and evaluating people in a new way, the old perspectives are among the things that have passed away. More broadly though, the things that have passed away encompass “the whole set of conditions and relationships that marked believers in their unregenerate state when they behaved κατὰ σάρκα.”<sup>23</sup> The term ἰδοὺ (Look!) draws the attention of the reader and flags the statement which follows as significant: *the new has come!*<sup>24</sup> The transition from the aorist παρῆλθεν (passed away) to the perfect γέγονεν (has come) is significant, indicating the new ongoing state of ‘re-createdness’ in which believers live. The language seems to be eschatological (cf. Is 43:18f LXX), suggesting that believers are in fact the first fruits of the new age.

**v18** All this newness of life is from God. Paul now brings the issue of reconciliation into focus, and uses two participles to highlight two things that God has done: first, he has *reconciled us to himself through Christ*, and second, *he gave to us the ministry of reconciliation*. The second flows out of the first. The first-person plural pronoun ἡμεῖς/ ἡμᾶς (us/ we) featured throughout this passage could grammatically be taken as inclusive or exclusive of the audience. Given the wider context of Paul’s defence of his ministry, it is probably best to understand the pronoun in this passage as exclusive, where Paul is referring to either himself and his co-workers, or the apostolic office.<sup>25</sup> Taking this position, though, does not mean

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<sup>21</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 431-32.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 432.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 433. This includes the way they were governed by thought and action by the desires of the flesh, as well as when they made assessments of other people in a worldly way.

<sup>24</sup> The NIV brings out the comparison between the old and new, but minimises the emphasis on that which is made new.

<sup>25</sup> So, Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 235.

that something that is said of Paul cannot also potentially be said of the believers in Corinth.<sup>26</sup>

God is the author, initiator, and executer of the reconciliation. Without God making reconciliation possible in Christ's work on the cross, humanity would not be able to be reconciled to God, even with the greatest of deeds and goodwill.<sup>27</sup> The obstacle on God's side has been removed. Whether Paul is speaking about himself or the believers in Corinth, the participle *καταλλάξαντος* (reconciled) is in the aorist tense meaning that the action of reconciliation is completed. However, the ministry of reconciliation is ongoing. People are not automatically reconciled, but they need to hear the word of reconciliation and respond (cf. 2 Cor 5:11).<sup>28</sup> As such, Paul's thought moves from the first point which has already been achieved: his own reconciliation with God; to the second point which is ongoing: the ministry of reconciliation where others are urged to respond to Christ's reconciling work.

**v19** The *ὡς ὅτι* (that is) indicates that in verse 19 Paul is clarifying and expanding on what he asserted in the previous verse. Paul uses three participles to be understood like three dot points, emphasising the two previous points, and adding one in between. The new addition is the middle point – detailing the key barrier which prevented reconciliation. The comparison with verse 18 can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 - Comparison of Verses 18 and 19**<sup>29</sup>

<b>v18</b>	<b>v19</b>
But it is all from God	That is, God was in Christ
who <u>reconciled</u> us to himself through Christ	<u>reconciling</u> the world to himself
and <u>gave</u> to us the ministry of reconciliation	<u>not counting</u> their sins against them
	<u>entrusting</u> to us the word of reconciliation

<sup>26</sup> The view taken in this essay, which is developed below, is that the Corinthians whom Paul is addressing, though they might not be included in the *ἡμᾶς* (us), they are referred to as 'saints' (1:1) and can be said to be included as those who are 'in Christ' and therefore should be considered as having already been reconciled to God.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 396.

<sup>28</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Participles are underlined.

In the center of verse 19, the barrier to reconciliation is shown to be peoples' sins. The effect of reconciliation can be likened to what Paul sees elsewhere as the result of justification, that is, the non-reckoning of people's sins (cf. Rom 4:8f).<sup>30</sup> This is the barrier which God removed in Christ, and is a central component of the message of reconciliation. Paul postpones his summary of the way in which the cross of Christ enabled this non-reckoning of sins until verse 21.

The object of the reconciliation moves from *us* in the previous verse, to *the world* and *them* in this verse. However, rather than isolating this verse to support a universalist theology, the universal expression of 'world' should be interpreted in light of Paul's statements in Rom 4:7-12, where blessing of forgiveness (described there also as a non-reckoning of sins) is not limited to Jews, but all *who believe*.<sup>31</sup> So it could be said that reconciliation, like forgiveness, is offered to the world, and achieved for those who believe and are included 'in Christ'.

NIV treats ἦν ... καταλλάσσων as a periphrastic construction: 'God was reconciling...'. Probably the strongest argument against this sense is the distance between the verb and the participle,<sup>32</sup> as well as the existence of the two following participles which then have to be treated differently. NASB takes θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ (God was in Christ) as the main clause, and then subordinates the next two participles under this clause,<sup>33</sup> but then treats the third participle as independent, functioning as a main verb.<sup>34</sup> It would seem that the best translation is to treat all three participles in the same way: as resultant participles subordinate to the clause 'God was in Christ'.<sup>35</sup> In this way the three participles can be seen as functioning like three dot points, giving three 'actions' of God 'in Christ'.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 396.

<sup>31</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Richard H. Bell, 'Sacrifice and Christology in Paul' in *JTS* 53/1 (2002), 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> (1) 'reconciling the world to Himself,' (2) 'not counting their trespasses against them'

<sup>34</sup> 'and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.'

<sup>35</sup> This option is supported by NRSV.

<sup>36</sup> God was in Christ [1] reconciling the world to himself, [2] not counting their sins against them, and [3] placing in us the word of reconciliation.

**v20** While the reconciling work was done by God through Christ (v18), the message about that work has been entrusted to Paul (v19), and as such, he and those who share in this task, have been commissioned with the responsibility of carrying out the role of an ambassador, to speak this message on behalf of Christ, just as if God himself were pleading through them (cf. Eph 6:19-20). This should be considered a high calling. Miller notes that the difference between a herald and an ambassador is that the ambassador doesn't simply declare something to be true, but negotiates and interacts (cf. 2 Cor 5:11).<sup>37</sup> An ambassador cannot stand aloof, or on a 'soapbox', but must engage their target audience, urging them to accept the message. Most importantly, an ambassador is a living example, speaking not just with *words*, but also through their *actions*. They must embody the truth of the message they carry.<sup>38</sup> At the end of this verse, and into the next, Paul provides a summary of the *content* of the message, then in 6:1-2 he addresses the *actions* of those who, along with him, also carry this message of reconciliation.

If it is true that Paul is addressing believers, who he previously refers to as saints (1:1), then he considers their reconciliation with God as already accomplished (v17), and it is unlikely that he is calling *them* specifically to reconciliation with God. Yet this is obscured by translations such as NIV and NASB which add the direct object "you" which may seem to be implied.<sup>39</sup> Those who suggest a translation such as this have to justify it by giving reasons why Paul is calling the saints in Corinth to be reconciled to God. Boers suggests a two-part reconciliation, whereby God is reconciled to the Corinthians, and Paul is admonishing them to reconcile themselves with him.<sup>40</sup> This line of argument seems cumbersome, and is unattractive in light of

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<sup>37</sup> Glenn T. Miller, '2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13' in *Interpretation* 54/2 (2000), 187.

<sup>38</sup> It is likely that there is both a secular as well as prophetic and OT background to Paul's concept of ambassador and reconciliation. In view of its secular use, Paul's role is to announce a 'peace treaty' with his enemies declaring an official pardon of sin. The prophetic and OT background is informed by Isaiah, the role of Moses, and concepts regarding sacrifice and atonement. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 246.

<sup>39</sup> We implore **you** on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (NIV, emphasis added)

<sup>40</sup> Hendrikus Boers, '2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2: A Fragment of Pauline Christology' in *CBQ* 64 (2002), 542. Similarly, Ralph Martin speaks of obstacles to reconciliation on both God's side and humanity's side. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 154-55. This is undoubtedly true, but Martin suggests that reconciliation is *accomplished* on the cross. Surely the cross removed the obstacle on God's side, but perhaps it is better to speak of reconciliation being *enabled* or *rightly offered*

the other options. A more plausible argument in favour of viewing this imperative as being directed to the Corinthians is the charge that “to the degree that they are alienated from Paul, to that degree they are alienated from God.”<sup>41</sup> However, given that Paul speaks of believers as (1) a new creation, (2) ‘in Christ’ and (3) being reconciled (aorist tense, meaning completed action), it is questionable whether he would support Witherington’s notion of a ‘degree’ of reconciliation with God.

If the direct object ‘you’ is not implied, and not added in translation, or perhaps a direct object such as ‘people’ is provided instead, the meaning of the verse can be seen to be more that of *stating the content* of the ambassadorial message, that is: “we implore *people* on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God”, rather than specifically calling the *Corinthians* to reconciliation with God. This would make more sense in light of the assumption that Paul is talking to believers who are already reconciled to God. Harris also removes the need for adding an implied direct object suggesting the translation: “On Christ’s behalf we make this entreaty: ‘Get reconciled to God!’”<sup>42</sup>

So the tentative conclusion is made here that Paul is not calling the saints in Corinth to reconciliation with God, but rather – in the context of his desire for them to consolidate their reconciliation with him – Paul reminds them that the gospel, to which he and the Corinthians are both already committed, is a message of reconciliation between God and people. Having established this common ground, in 6:1 Paul will bring it to bear in support of his purpose for writing.

**v21** Here Paul continues the content of the ambassadorial message: that the sinless one was made to be sin on behalf of sinners, so that in him, believers might become the righteousness of God. This verse is a fertile seed-bed for theology. It

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because of the cross. It seems that reconciliation is not *accomplished* until the two parties are reconciled.

<sup>41</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 396-97.

<sup>42</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447. The NLT also resists supplying a direct object: “We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”

includes reference to the sinless Christ, provides a foundation for the theology of the atonement, and highlights the believer's union with Christ as the sphere in which they can rightly become the 'righteousness of God'.

Christ's being made to be sin must be understood against the backdrop of the Jewish understanding of substitutionary sacrifice as the means for atonement and reconciliation with God (Lev 4:1-35; 16:1-34; 17:11).<sup>43</sup> It is this need for atonement pre-figured in these sacrifices which is fulfilled in the atoning death of Christ (cf. Rom 3:25-26; 4:25; 5:8; 8:3; Gal 3:13; Col 1:19-20). Jesus, the sinless Christ, in the garb of the suffering servant (Isa 52:13—53:12), bears the sin of God's people as their substitute.<sup>44</sup> Sin is highlighted as the key roadblock which stands in the way of reconciliation, and Christ's atoning death on behalf of sinners is given as that which removes this barrier. Christ was treated as though he were sinful - even though he wasn't - and died on the sinners' behalf, so that those who are 'in Christ' could be considered as righteous - even though they too are not. The reconciliation of the believer manifests in them being included 'in Christ', and in the context of this union with Christ, the believer becomes the righteousness of God.<sup>45</sup>

Boers, who is content to view 5:14-6:2 as a fragment unrelated to the rest of the letter, suggests that v21 is "syntactically unconnected to what proceeds and thematically does not continue the theme of God's reconciliation of vv18-20."<sup>46</sup> On the surface this could be asserted, yet this verse is better understood as continuing the thought of the previous phrase. Rather than this being a theological bolt out of the blue, Paul is continuing the brief snapshot of the content of the ambassadorial

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<sup>43</sup> Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 247.

<sup>44</sup> Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 248.

<sup>45</sup> δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (righteousness of God) is a significant Pauline term. It is probably best to be understood here as being in a right relationship with God. Kruse provides a helpful definition of the term: "The righteousness of God, understood as that which believers have or become, is the gift of a right relationship with God based upon the fact that he has adjudicated in their favour by refusing, because of the death of Christ in their place, to take account of their sins." Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Boers, Boers, '2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2', 530.

message.<sup>47</sup> Surely, contrary to Boers, being ‘in him [Christ]’ and thus ‘becoming the righteousness of God’ is very much thematically linked with reconciliation.

**6:1** Irrespective of whether or not Paul considered the Corinthians to be included in the ἡμεῖς/ ἡμᾶς (us/ we) of the preceding verses, he certainly now builds rapport, appealing to them as ‘fellow workers’. Paul emphasises the common ground, that they together with him are fellow workers (with God) in this ministry of reconciliation. As such, he urges them *not to receive the grace of God in vain*. If the ‘grace of God’ can be taken to refer to “all that was proclaimed in the message of reconciliation”,<sup>48</sup> then in the context of the argument, Paul must be referring to the residual reluctance of the Corinthians to fully embrace Paul (cf. 6:11-13). That is, to receive God’s grace in vain would be to reconcile with God, but be unwilling or unable to reconcile with Paul, who is God’s chosen apostle (1:1). Having developed the common ground, and outlined the message of reconciliation that both he and the Corinthians are involved in, Paul now begins to apply this theology to bring about his purpose for writing, that is, to consolidate the reconciliation between himself and the Corinthians. He brings this to bear here by implying that it is inconsistent for both parties to be engaged in the ministry of reconciling others to God, when he and they are not fully reconciled to each other! It is with this purpose that Paul urges them not to receive God’s grace in vain.

**v2** In order to further urge the Corinthians toward reconciliation with himself, Paul directly quotes Is 49:8 from the LXX.<sup>49</sup> This passage in Deutero-Isaiah is in the context of the Israelites being called out of exile in Babylon. Paul draws a comparison between his own ministry to the Corinthians with that of the suffering servant’s ministry to Israel. For the Israelites in exile, the day of salvation ultimately

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<sup>47</sup> Reading the passage in this way, the message of reconciliation is: “Be reconciled to God! The one who did not know sin, was made to be sin on our behalf, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.”

<sup>48</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 130.

<sup>49</sup> “At the right time I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.”

represented *restoration of what it meant to truly be the people of God*.<sup>50</sup> In that setting, restoration took the form of returning to Israel, repossessing the land, rebuilding the temple, and renewing the covenant. However, Paul applies this quote as relating to the believers in Corinth *now*.<sup>51</sup> The question which remains is: in what way is Paul using this quote here? It is not sufficient to conclude that Paul is calling unbelievers to repentance, since this ignores Paul's audience, and fails to make sense of this phrase in the context of Paul's argument. Rather, Paul is employing this exhortation in line with his purpose for writing. The day of salvation still represents a restoration of what it means to truly be the people of God, but for the Corinthians, rather than this being a return to Israel, it is linked with restoration of relationships within the church community. That is, truly living as the people of God in the new covenant involves reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another, especially with Paul. To reject Paul and his message is to put oneself outside of the sphere of God's redemptive work.<sup>52</sup> The Corinthians are not to make the same mistake of many Israelites who missed the call of the prophet to come out of exile, rather the Corinthians are to align themselves with Paul and his message, and participate in their current 'day of salvation', namely, the restoration between them and their apostle. As such, Paul is urging them *now*, to consolidate their reconciliation with him. To this end he continues on in the following passage,<sup>53</sup> making explicit this call to consolidate their reconciliation with him in 6:11-13 and 7:2-4.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This passage lays a theological foundation for the concept of reconciliation. Paul elucidates the theological and sociological reality of the Corinthian believers' reconciliation with God, which is authored, initiated and executed by God through

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<sup>50</sup> For this point, and insight into how it applies here to 2 Corinthians chapter 6, I am indebted to Lindsay Tunbridge, private conversation.

<sup>51</sup> "Behold, now is the right time. Behold, now is the day of salvation."

<sup>52</sup> Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 249.

<sup>53</sup> Including a portrayal of his ministry as a ministry of suffering (vv3-10), continuing the idea of the suffering servant.

the saving work of Christ. This reality is that they (1) are reconciled with God, (2) are a new creation, and (3) no longer evaluate others from a worldly perspective. This is true both in the life of Paul (and his co-workers) and the believers in Corinth. As fellow workers with Paul as Christ's ambassadors, they call others to be reconciled to God. However, it is incongruous for the two parties, who carry a message of reconciliation, to not be fully reconciled with each other. So, in line with his purpose for writing, Paul urges them in light of this inconsistency, to consolidate their reconciliation with him, their suffering servant, and in so doing, to participate in God's restorative activity: their own 'day of salvation'.

## **5. APPLICATION**

At its most fundamental level, the gospel message is a message of reconciliation between people and God, and Christians must be ambassadors of this message. Ambassadors, especially in a postmodern setting, must communicate the message of reconciliation by both word and deed. Next to resurrection from the dead, and reconciliation with God, the redemptive work of God has no greater expression than in restoring people who have become divided. Churches are to be places where the people of God demonstrate God's reconciling power by reconciling with each other. The extent to which divorce, family breakdown, and factionalism exists in the church is the extent to which its message of reconciliation will be scoffed at by those looking on. Reconciliation, after deep wounds have been inflicted, does not come automatically or easily, nor is it possible by mere human effort. It can only be supernaturally empowered by God. Christians, like Paul, must be prepared to suffer for the sake of reconciliation, if the message of reconciliation between God and people is to have any plausibility for those outside of the church.

The model of 'ambassador' is a great model for evangelism in today's postmodern culture.<sup>54</sup> In the current historical and socio-cultural setting of suburban Australia,

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<sup>54</sup> A Christian's 'job description' could be summarised to be: "as ambassadors, you must urge people to be reconciled to God."

some principles are suggested here which will likely increase the effectiveness of Christians as ambassadors. (1) Be involved relationally in the lives of the recipients of the message. Ambassadors are relational and desire to respectfully understand the point of view of those they engage with (while holding a different point of view). (2) Narrative and dialogue tends to be more effective than reason and assertion. Postmodernists are cynical and suspicious of truth claims, especially when used as a way of exercising power or authority over other people or groups.<sup>55</sup> (3) Smith suggests the following qualities desirable in an ambassador: loyalty, integrity, humility, spirituality, and love.<sup>56</sup> For a Christian ambassador to be effective, they must combine a patriotic loyalty to God, with a passionate love for the people in their culture.<sup>57</sup> (4) Ambassadors of reconciliation in a postmodern setting must be able to 'walk the walk'. People in this culture aren't interested in detached theological musings, but want to see if and how their lives can be impacted. The effects of a life reconciled to God must be modelled to people, so that they can see that it works – and is therefore 'true'.<sup>58</sup> (5) All evangelistic efforts must be undergirded by prayer. Apologetics and reasoned argument is important (cf. 2 Cor 5:11), but it is not simply a case of 'whoever puts forward the best argument wins'. Regarding Christ, people must perceive him spiritually. Believers must pray for those around them, who currently evaluate Christ from a worldly perspective, that they might have spiritual insight into his true nature. (6) Unlike ministry in Christendom, in post-Christendom many do not actually know about this God. Therefore, the message must start a step back, by telling the story of Jesus. Ambassadors cannot assume that their audience has heard of Jesus, and if they have, their understanding is likely to be a caricature through the eyes of popular media.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 45.

<sup>56</sup> Colin S. Smith, 'The Ambassador's Job Description: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21' in *Telling the Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 178.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, 'Ambassador's Job Description', 179.

<sup>58</sup> Long suggests regarding the postmodern generation that: "For them truth is not so much stated as experienced. This generation needs to have truth lived out before it, not stated to it." Long, *Generating Hope*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> The message will have to include a number of key elements that are quite foreign in today's postmodern Australia, namely the nature of Christian God, the life and work of Jesus, and the problem of sin. The issue of sin in particular, despite being unpopular, remains a core issue to

A final point is that Christians who no longer evaluate each other and their world κατὰ σάρκα (according to the flesh) have a new worldview,<sup>60</sup> which will impact the way they view success, particularly success in ministry. In light of this passage and of the ministries of the suffering servant, Jesus, and Paul, no one should view suffering as a sign of God's disfavour. Rather, Christians should acknowledge that the absorption of injustice via the vicarious suffering of God's servants today is a key means by which God brings about restoration and redemption in this broken world.

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be addressed by the postmodern ambassador. The gospel is good news in that it responds to, and provides a solution to the problem of sin. It should be noted that If the postmodern audience does not see sin as a problem, then nor will they see Christ's death as a solution. This is indeed a challenge for the postmodern ambassador.

<sup>60</sup> "When a person becomes a Christian, he or she experiences a total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric – thinking, feeling, willing, and acting." Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 434.

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